



U.S. Congressman

Lincoln Diaz-Balart

21st District, Florida

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Dear Friends,

The 106th Congress will face many important challenges, among them improving America's public schools and providing tax relief to working families. I wanted to provide you with information on my priorities for the 106th Congress as well as to make sure you were aware of some of the highlights of tax changes from the 105th Congress that you are just now able to enjoy.

It is a privilege to represent the 21st District of Florida in Washington and I look forward to your thoughts and ideas on how Congress can continue to improve upon issues you feel are important.

Cordially,

Lincoln Diaz-Balart

DIAZ-BALART BRINGS NASA TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Recently, I participated, along with students from G. Holmes Braddock Senior High School, in NASA's (the National Aeronautics and Space Administration) sixth annual national videoconference.

Discussions with scientists and engineers from NASA, and students and teachers at G. Holmes Braddock Senior High School, dealt with the future and goals of the International Space Station (ISS). 1999 marks the launching of the first two elements of the ISS and the beginning of construction in space of the orbiting laboratory. The title of the discussion was: "ISS: Some Assembly Required". The videoconference, which was live and interactive, allowed students and teachers to communicate with NASA by calling, e-mailing or faxing their questions for direct answers.

I look to continue this partnership with NASA and offer these videoconferences to other high schools in the district.



Congressman Diaz-Balart asks students at G. Holmes Braddock Sr. High School for a show of hands on a question regarding the future of the international space station.

EDUCATION FOR THE NEXT MILLENNIUM

We have a wonderful opportunity this Congress to build on the successes which have made possible special incentives for higher education, such as the \$1,500 credit for each of the first two years of a child's post-secondary education, or the \$1,000 tax credit for any year of a child's post-secondary education, including vocational school. These two provisions will benefit 7 million students, and families were already able to claim them on their 1998 federal income taxes.

To build on the higher education assistance, the 106th Congress will be working to reauthorize and improve most federal programs for education in grades kindergarten through 12 (K-12). The authorization for these programs under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and the Goals 2000: Educate America Act (Goals 2000) will soon expire, along with authority for federal education research and statistics. The ESEA supports programs and services for specific groups of children, such as grants for the education of the disadvantaged. Goals 2000 authorizes grants for state and local standards-based reform efforts.

We in Congress have utilized a variety of methods to try to improve the quality of K-12 education. Federal financial support for K-12 education is estimated at 6.3% of school revenues from all sources; this percentage can be significantly higher for schools with concentrations of target children, such as the disadvantaged. We have recently funded several new initiatives, including class size reduction, comprehensive school reform demonstrations, and education technology. Other federal activities include support for educational improvement through challenging curriculum content, assessments and performance standards, rewards and sanctions for performance outcomes, regulatory waivers, charter schools, greater targeting on high poverty schools, and standards-based reform activities.

Areas of improvement that I will be working on include:

- the effectiveness of federal support for the education of the disadvantaged under ESEA Title I;
- the possible tradeoff between increased accountability and regulatory flexibility;
- the possibility of consolidating numerous programs into block grants;
- the extent to which the federal government supports school programs to give parents greater options;
- the need for additional teachers, and support for improved quality of classroom teaching;
- the need to get more federal dollars through the federal bureaucracy and to the classrooms; and
- proposals for federal support for the K-12 infrastructure, including new and improved facilities and equipment and other technology enhancements.

H.R. 2 has been introduced in the House for a major education initiative, the Dollars to the Classroom Act, which will enable local educators to have more options for spending federal funds by increasing the amount of federal dollars that go directly to the classroom. Funds could be used for the recruiting, hiring, training and testing of regular teachers, special education teachers and teachers of special needs children. As a member of the Rules Committee, I was proud to bring this bill to the House floor last Congress, and will work to make this bill become law this Congress.

SCHOLARSHIPS AND OTHER PROGRAMS

It is a high priority of mine to keep local high schools informed of scholarships and financial aid being offered by the Department of Education and national organizations.

Recently, I forwarded information to all the high schools within the 21st district regarding the Congress-- Bundestag Vocational Youth Exchange Program, a full scholarship program which affords outstanding vocational students the opportunity to spend a year studying the language, attending school, and working in an internship while living with a German host family, and about the NALEO 1999 Summer Legislative Intern Program.

I also shared information with district high schools regarding other scholarship programs available in 1999.

To find information about scholarships and financial aid available for college, students should speak to their school counselors. Local libraries and the "internet" are also great sources of information regarding scholarships and financial aid.

To learn more about possible scholarships available or for information regarding financial aid for college, please call or write to me at my district office or access e-mail through my home page at: <http://www.house.gov/diaz-balart/>.



Florida International University ROTC students meet with Representative Diaz-Balart to discuss the armed forces during FIU's 1999 Homecoming Parade

Tax Changes to Keep in Mind for 1999

I wanted to make sure that you were aware of the many new benefits which are available thanks to the passage of the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997, the IRS Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998, and the Tax and Trade Relief Act of 1998--legislation which I was pleased to support to provide tax relief to the American people.

- **Child Tax Credit.** For each child under age 17, families received a \$400 tax credit (applies to single filers with adjusted gross incomes less than \$75,000, and joint filers with incomes less than \$110,000) for their 1998 taxes. On January 1, 1999, the credit increased to \$500. This credit covers 48.3 million children.
- **Lower Taxes on Capital Gains:** 1998 was the first full year of capital gains tax relief. Joint filers with taxable income less than \$42,350 a year will now pay a 10% tax on their long-term capital gains; those earning more will pay 20% (down from 15% and 28%). For single filers, the 10% rate applies to those with taxable incomes less than \$25,350, the 20% rate applies to those with higher incomes. About 15 million Americans report capital gains income every year.
- **The Roth IRA:** The new Roth IRA allows tax-free withdrawals for joint filers with adjusted gross incomes below the phase-out range of \$150,000-\$160,000. Single filers below a phase-out range of \$95,000-\$110,000 also qualify. Annual contributions of up to \$2,000 are permitted. Unlike a traditional IRA, contributions to Roth IRAs are taxable, but the income earned upon retirement is tax-free.
- **Education IRAs:** Non-deductible contributions of up to \$500 per year can be made to an education IRA for a child under age 18, with earnings accumulating tax-free.

As you face questions about federal income taxes, many of your answers can be found on-line at the Internal Revenue Website, www.irs.ustreas.gov. There is also a toll-free IRS help line, 1-800-829-1040

HOW TO CONTACT CONGRESSMAN LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART

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Also, visit <http://www.house.gov/diaz-balart/>